Better Homes & Gardens

HALLOWEEN CELEBRATIONS™

124 WICKED PARTY IDEAS

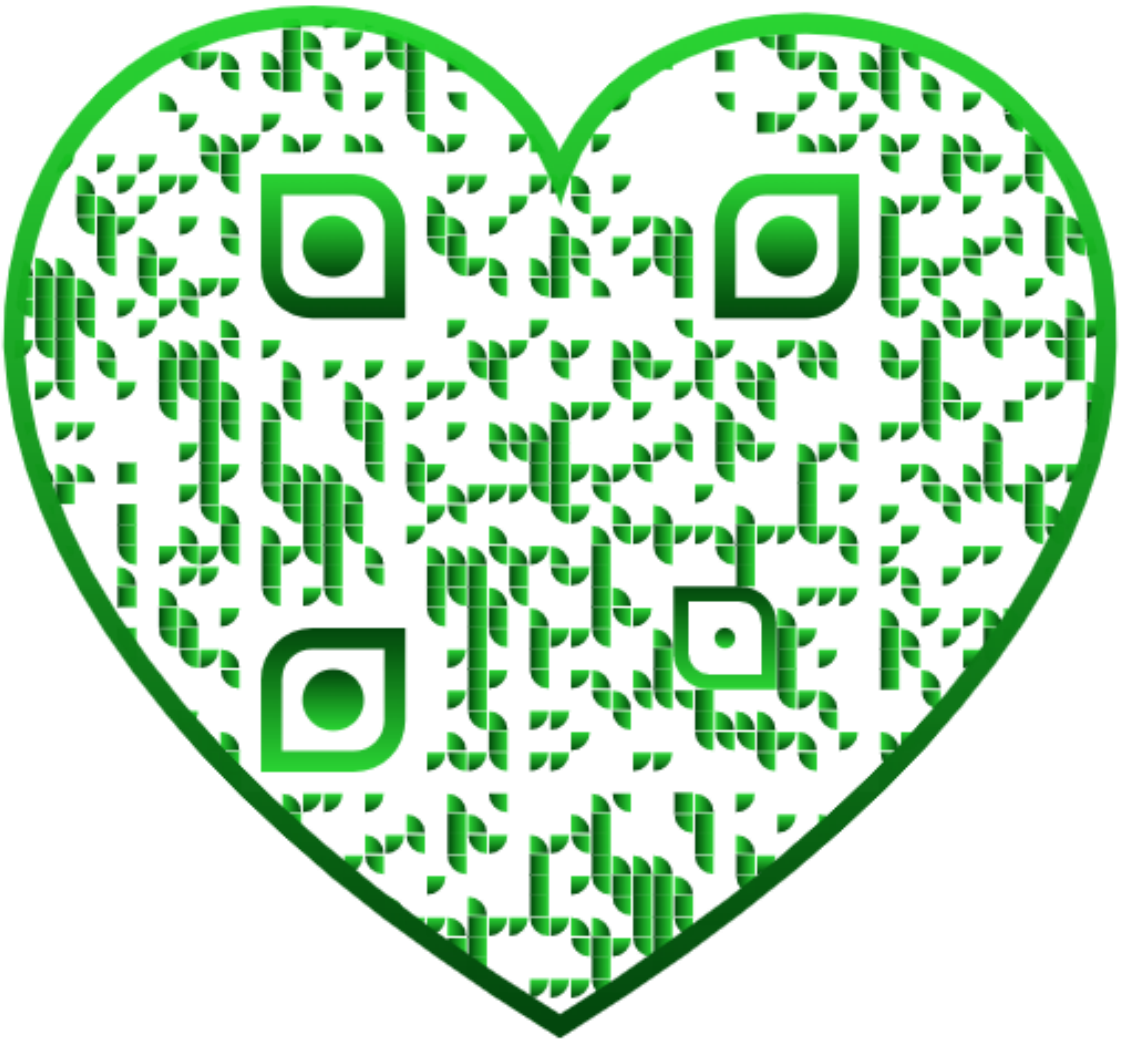
CRAFT A MAGICAL GATHERING

RECIPES, FAVORS, GAMES & MORE

EERILY EASY DECORATING PROJECTS

CROWD-PLEASING FOOD AND DRINKS

2025



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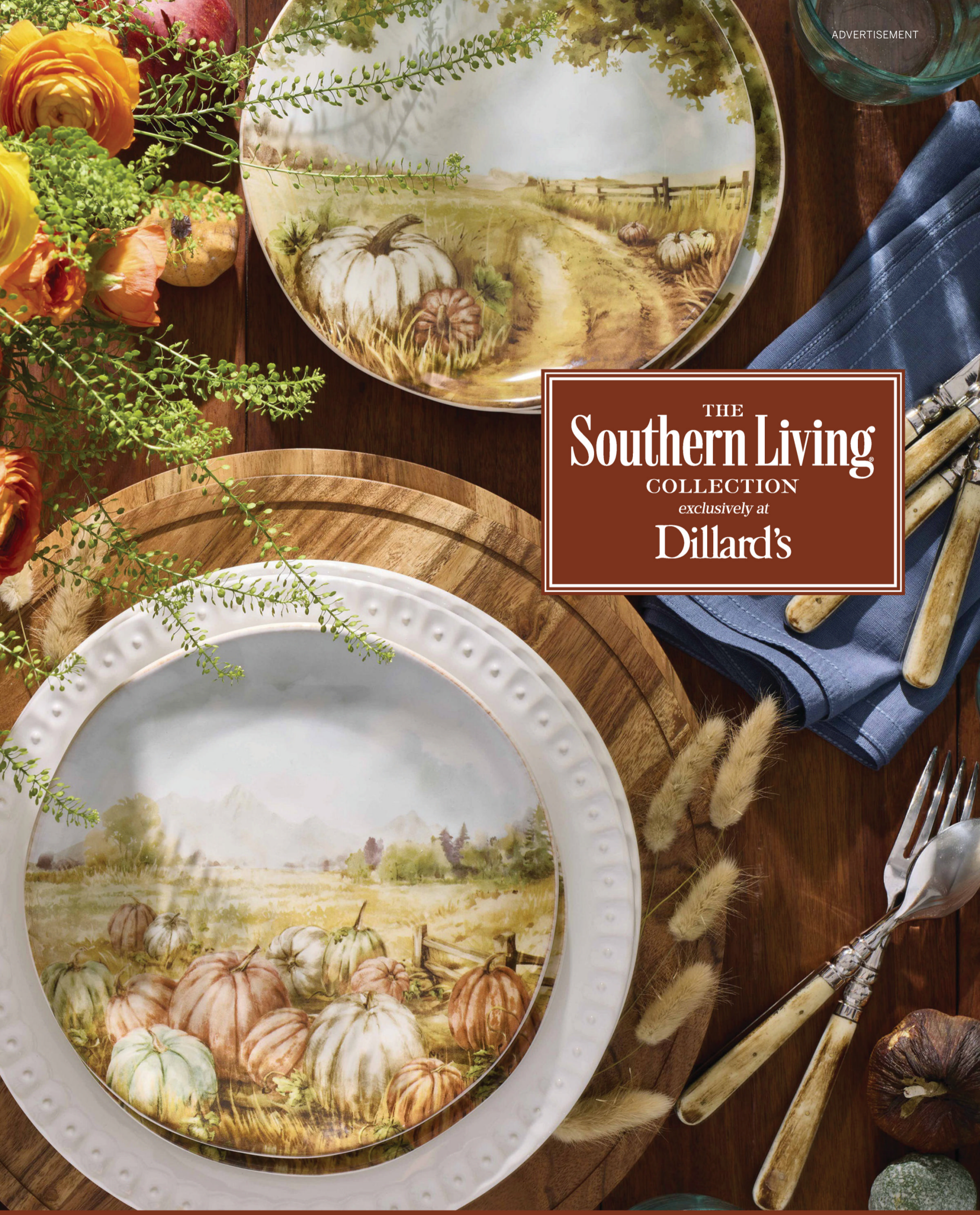

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EASY-PEASY PAINTERLY PUMPKINS

Achieve this graphic look in minutes to create bold centerpieces or party favors. Simply fill old containers or paper bowls with acrylic paint in desired colors. Mix in a bit of water so paint is fluid but not watery. Dip mini pumpkins partway into paint, pull out, and set on waxed paper to dry.

Halloween CELEBRATIONS

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PHOTOGRAPHER CARSON DOWNING

From the Editor

WHOOOO'S READY TO PARTY?

The air is crisp, the leaves are changing, and it's the spookiest time of year. Not that we need an excuse to celebrate fall, but Halloween is the best one. The popularity of the holiday's festivities got us thinking, *Why not devote a whole issue to them?* So we have a little bit of something for everyone, including small soirees, a celebratory movie night on the couch, and full-out kid bashes.

If a quiet, elegant dinner party is more your speed, see "Dark Repast" *(page 62)* for recipe ideas. Be ready for guests to swoon over your chilling charcuterie.

Want to start some new traditions? Get inspired by a New Jersey family's annual party *(page 8)*. Their band of cousin witches gather together in costume for treats, activities, and some adorable photo ops.

Have a work or school gathering you'd like to impress? Check out our "Cupcake Collages" *(page 54)*, where simple designs come together quickly with cupcake mixes and wickedly easy embellishments.

Your interest is piqued, but you don't want to spend a fortune? Turn to "Vintage Spirit" *(page 26)* for great ideas on inexpensive party supplies and over-the-top balloon art. Bonus: You'll be supporting small businesses.

This issue is packed with so many fantastic ideas for games, food, and decor. We hope it gets you in the party mood and you have the most spooktacular season ever.

Nicole Dean

NICOLE DEAN
SENIOR EDITOR, HOLIDAYS

KNOCK, KNOCK.
WHO'S THERE?
SKELETONS OF
EVERY TYPE.
WE MAKE EASY DECOR
TO SET THE MOOD.

PHOTOGRAPHER: BRIE WILLIAMS

Better Homes & Gardens.

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READY, SET, SCARE

IT'S HALLOWEEN PARTY TIME!

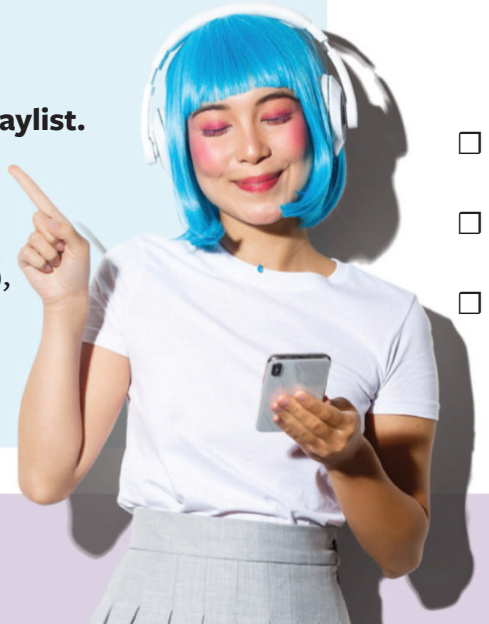
We've spelled out strategies to help you plan, prep, and conjure up loads of spooky fun to entertain ghouls of all ages.

WRITER BERIT THORKELSON

A GRAVEYARD SMASH

Add these cross-generational tunes to your party playlist.

"Superstition" (Stevie Wonder), "Bloody Mary" (Lady Gaga), "Psycho Killer" (Talking Heads), "Bad Guy" (Billie Eilish), "Halloween Theme–Main Title" (John Carpenter), "The Killing Moon" (Echo & the Bunnymen), "Season of the Witch" (Lana Del Rey), "Zombie" (The Cranberries)



COUNTDOWN to CREEPSVILLE

3 TO 4 WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Set budget
- ☐ Send invites
- ☐ Plan food and drinks
- ☐ Plan and order decor
- ☐ Plan costume

2 TO 3 WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Check sound system and make playlist
- ☐ Set activities/games
- ☐ Plan/purchase/borrow tableware, serving dishes, utensils, and napkins

1 TO 2 WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Decorate
- ☐ Round up extra tables, chairs, and blankets as needed
- ☐ Plan for trash and recycling

WEEK OF

- ☐ Clean
- ☐ Grocery shop
- ☐ Prep food and drinks
- ☐ Prep firepit or outdoor heater

DAY OF

- ☐ Finalize to-dos and setup
- ☐ Have a friend on hand to help
- ☐ Have a frighteningly good time!

MAKE & TAKE

Stock a crafts table with pumpkins and a selection of adornments for an all-ages, no-carve activity that will double as a party favor. Remember the glue!

- ☐ Paint pens
- ☐ Googly eyes
- ☐ Dried flowers
- ☐ Fabric scraps
- ☐ Yarn or ribbon
- ☐ Pom-poms
- ☐ Stencils
- ☐ Colored tape
- ☐ Stickers
- ☐ Gems or sequins
- ☐ Seasonal dollar store decor

PICK YOUR POISON

Three easy ways to add chills to party drinks.

1
THE EYES HAVE IT

For garnishes that are equal parts creepy and yummy, skewer gummy candy eyeballs or freeze them in an ice-cube tray ahead of time for a chilling treat.

2
JUST ADD (DRY) ICE

It's an inexpensive way to transform a punch bowl into a dramatic cauldron. (Do not eat dry ice, and take extra caution around kids.)

3
WELCOME SPIRITS

Make a spooky signature cocktail with bright green Midori, pumpkin spice liqueur, or a seasonal black-color spirit like Blavod vodka.

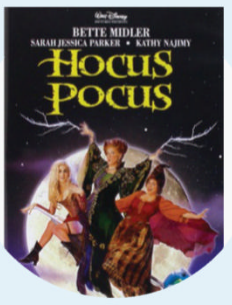
MOVIE GOBBLIN'

A Halloween movie night always makes the list. What better way to enjoy than their own bag of popcorn made their way?

Popcorn + mix-ins like Reese's Pieces, mini marshmallows, Chex, caramel corn, gummy worms, Milk Duds, pretzels, dried fruit, Goldfish crackers, and red licorice.

JUMP SCARES

Family-friendly watch-party options, ranked from least to most frightening.



- ☐ *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) G
- ☐ *Hocus Pocus* (1993) PG
- ☐ *Hocus Pocus 2* (2022) PG
- ☐ *Hotel Transylvania* (2012) PG
- ☐ *Coco* (2017) PG
- ☐ *Beetlejuice* (1988) PG
- ☐ *Coraline* (2009) PG

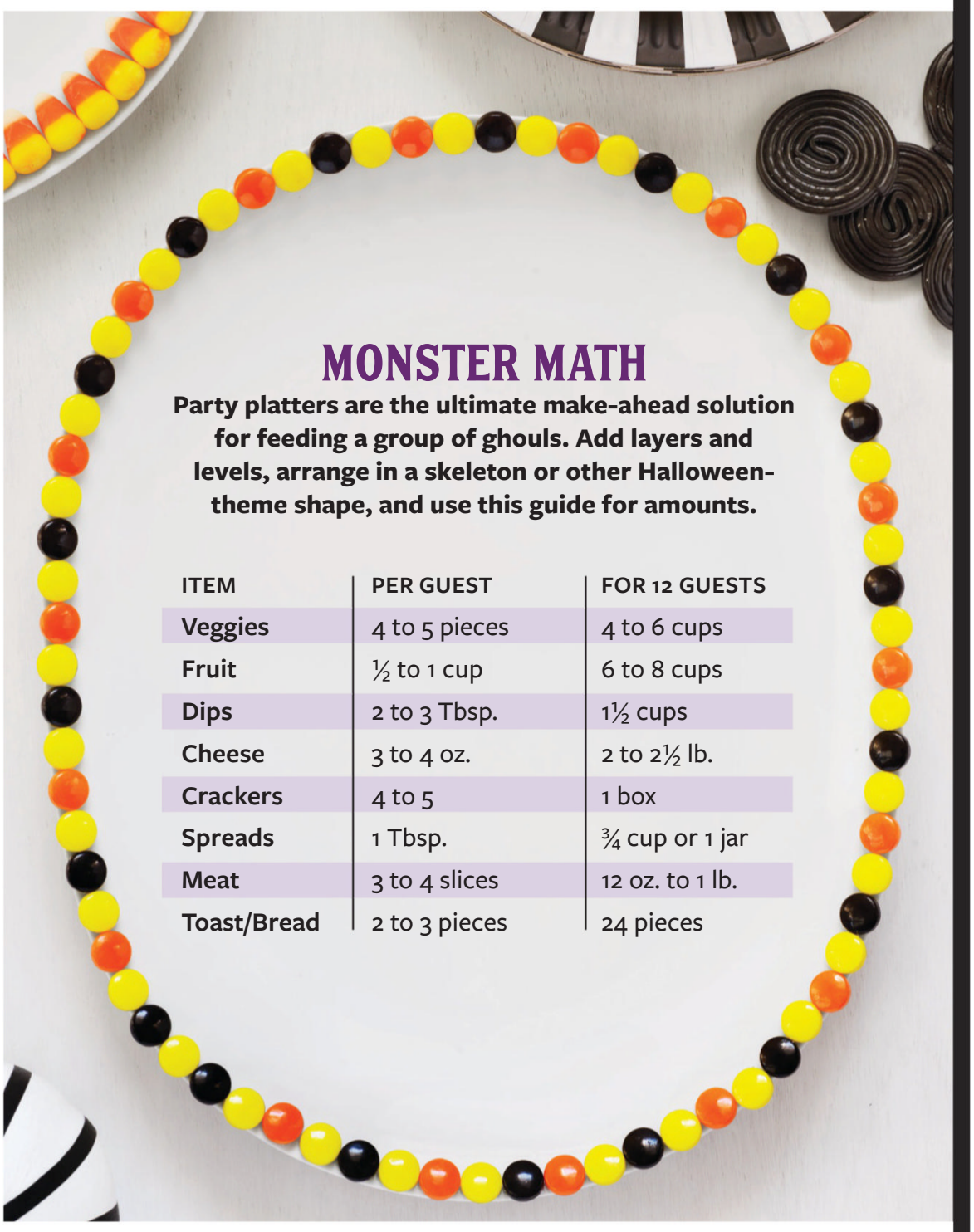
TREATS OR TRICKS

America's top-tier Halloween handouts, according to *candystore.com*.

M&M's, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, Sour Patch Kids, Skittles, Starburst, Hot Tamales, candy corn, Hershey's Kisses, Hershey's Chocolate Miniatures, Butterfinger bars

YOU'RE NOT ALONE! OF 2,000 PARENTS ASKED, TWO-THIRDS ADMIT TO STEALING HALLOWEEN CANDY FROM THEIR KIDS.

SOURCE: *studyfinds.org*



MONSTER MATH

Party platters are the ultimate make-ahead solution for feeding a group of ghouls. Add layers and levels, arrange in a skeleton or other Halloween-theme shape, and use this guide for amounts.

ITEM	PER GUEST	FOR 12 GUESTS
Veggies	4 to 5 pieces	4 to 6 cups
Fruit	½ to 1 cup	6 to 8 cups
Dips	2 to 3 Tbsp.	1½ cups
Cheese	3 to 4 oz.	2 to 2½ lb.
Crackers	4 to 5	1 box
Spreads	1 Tbsp.	¾ cup or 1 jar
Meat	3 to 4 slices	12 oz. to 1 lb.
Toast/Bread	2 to 3 pieces	24 pieces

MOOD LIGHTING

Think outside the jack-o'-lantern.

SPECIALTY BULBS

Eerie options include faux flames, painted-on blood splatter, or motion-triggered flickers.

BATTERY-POWERED TAPERS

Stick them in vintage candelabras, or string from the ceiling for a Harry Potter-style floating effect.

SPOTLIGHTS

Play around with uplighting and backlighting, then add in a fog machine to boost the scare factor.

PROJECTIONS

Possibilities from cartoony to creepy include swooping ghosts, ceiling bats, and zombies lurking in the window.

STRING LIGHTS

Layer purple or green strands—outdoors or in—or go multicolored and re-create the *Stranger Things* wall alphabet.

A COVEN of COUSINS

This family's tradition is a way to make the most of their grandmother's love of dressing up and celebrating Halloween—and it's witchy good fun too!

WRITER SARAH EGGE **PHOTOGRAPHER** ADAM ALBRIGHT

WITCHES CREW
Enjoying Halloween runs in the family, from left: Juliana Cowell (5), Emily Reading (11), Lola Reading (3), Elizabeth Lockington (11), Catherine Lockington (9), Victoria Lockington (13), and Gracie Reading (9).

IF YOU'RE LUCKY, A FEW WEEKS BEFORE HALLOWEEN, YOU MAY SPY A GAGGLE OF GIGGLING WITCHES riding their broomsticks and stirring a cauldron in a leaf-strewn park in rural New Jersey. They are the eight granddaughters of Andrea Reading, who conjured this treasured tradition in 2018. "My mom is super creative and very thoughtful and always does everything she can to make everyone feel special. And she just loves Halloween," says her daughter Renee Lockington, who helps gather the young spell casters, three of whom are her own daughters.

Renee and her siblings set a date, then Andrea sources the dresses in the needed sizes, carefully choosing designs that are unique from one year to the next. They all meet at a park or nearby historical mansion for games and photos, then troop back to someone's house for treats and more fun. As more granddaughters are born, they are folded into the celebration. This year, baby Natasha will join the crew.

The cousins relish the opportunity to be together. "They are like little best friends. They have secret handshakes and cute dances they make up," Renee says. "We're hoping that someday when they have their own kids, they'll carry on the tradition."

WELCOME TREATS

Renee's sister Monica makes specialty cookies (Instagram @sharpspartysugarcookies) in festive themes, *left,* and brings candied apples. The girls' grandmother, who they call Grand Mom, assembles goody bags, *this photo,* for them to take home.

PLAYING DRESS-UP
The Lockington family owns Sharps Farmhouse, a storied place that predates the Revolutionary War and sets the perfect scene for get-togethers. This year, Renee's vision of turning her home into The Black Hat Inn, a hotel run by Salem witches, came to life.

SIT FOR A SPELL

To set up the event, Renee filled the house with spooky decorations. She chronicles her 1767 home and seasonal decorating ideas on Instagram (@sharpsfarm). The dining table focal point is the cake covered with a black cage cloche topped with a raven. Orange napkins and cups shaped like cauldrons add Halloween flavor atop a black-and-white checked cloth.

"WE FEEL LIKE HALLOWEEN IS SO NOSTALGIC AND MAGICAL."

— HOMEOWNER RENEE LOCKINGTON

YEAR AFTER YEAR

"We save the dresses so the girls can pass them on to their own kids someday," Renee says. They also invest in sturdy hats, *above,* that can be reused from year to year.

PICK YOUR POISON

A pumpkin-shape beverage dispenser holds apple cider, *right.* Renee has a collection of vintage pewterware that suits the old-Salem theme.

PLACES, PLEASE

Designs on the black-and-white plates, *below,* remind Renee of the cousins and their adventures. She looks for themed accessories all year at vintage and home decor stores.

COOKING UP FUN
The girls assemble magic potions from fragrant dried herbs and flowers using Renee's collection of vintage labware. She decorated the shelves with festive signs, bottles, and a Ouija board she had as a teenager.

HARMLESS CHARMS

The girls, *top,* concentrate as they pack their potions into thrift store vases and recycled jars they can seal with corks.

MAGICAL MAKINGS

Ingredients, *above,* include rosemary, lavender, cinnamon sticks, rose hips, and dried citrus peels, which were purchased online and at the grocery store.

TRICK OF THE EYE

One time Renee captured the girls jumping, and it looked like they were flying in the photo. Every year since, they try to re-create that magic, this time holding a broom while leaping from a tree stump, *right*.

CLEAN FUN

The girls blow bubbles, *left,* using mystical copper wire bubble wands they found on Etsy (*etsy.com/shop/ParkLaneProductions*).

BOIL AND BUBBLE

Rather than a wicked brew, these witches stir up bubble solution in their cauldron, *opposite*. It's simple enough to buy a large jug of bubble solution and pour it into the plastic container for party time.

CAPTURE THE MOMENT

Juliana, *below,* casts a spell as she and her cousins frolic at a local park. Each year, Renee takes pictures and puts them in a photo book for the families.

"DRESSING UP AS WITCHES TOGETHER IS A SWEET TRADITION THAT LINKS THE GENERATIONS."

— RENEE LOCKINGTON

LIGHTWEIGHT PLASTIC CAULDRONS CAN BE FOUND ONLINE, OR USE A LARGE BUCKET OR FLOWERPOT WITH THE DRAIN HOLES PLUGGED.

GHOSTLY GOODIES

Soirees and trick-or-treat night are hard to forget with these cute DIY decorations and party favors. They're easy to make with simple supplies, such as coffee filters and paper straws for cake toppers, yarn and pom-poms for a garland, and painted cardstock ghouls on gift bags.

FREE TEMPLATES

DOWNLOAD THE TEMPLATES FOR THE PROJECTS IN THIS STORY AT *BHG.COM/JUSTTREATS*

No Tricks,

JUST TREATS

Make the season extra special with eerie-sistible Halloween decor and other hauntingly fun projects!

INSTRUCTIONS
ON *PAGE 24.*

WRITER LAUREN LANDERS **PHOTOGRAPHER** KELSEY HANSEN **STYLIST** JESSICA THOMAS **PRODUCER** KIM HUTCHISON

DARING DINING

Raise the spirits at your party table with haunted house napkin holders made out of cardstock and cardboard tube sections (florists wire forms the window sashes). The whimsical floating ghosts are embellished cupcake liners draped over wood beads.

HAUNTED HANGINGS

Store-bought Halloween decorations often have scary price tags. But these hanging ghosts can be crafted with ease out of affordable honeycomb paper balls. Before opening up the honeycomb ball, trace a ghost template onto its liner. Cut and open up, then add eyes, mouth, and tassel to bring each charming Casper to life!

CUT, FOLD, AND ROLL STRIPS OF CREPE PAPER TO CREATE THESE COLORFUL TASSELS!

CREEPY CRAFTING

Haunt tablescapes, mantel displays, and bookshelves with colorful ghosts made of texturized cheesecloth, tissue paper, and/or fabric scraps. A simple cardstock witch hat and LED candle add even more flair. Painted faux pumpkins decorated with macramé cord phantoms are the perfect Halloween touch.

CREATE SIMPLE GHOST FORMS BY STACKING A BALLOON ON A JAR WITH MATERIAL SOAKED IN MOD PODGE PLACED ON TOP.

COUNTDOWN TO SPOOKY

Unveil a sweet surprise every day of October with this spooktacular calendar. Make your own layout of black jewelry gift boxes and a few playfully painted ghosts on a covered wire wreath frame.

BOO-IT-YOURSELF

Make these easy Halloween decorations with a few easy-to-find, inexpensive supplies from crafts stores or your own stash.

GHOSTLY GOODIES CAKE TOPPERS PAGE 18

MATERIALS

- Black and white acrylic paint and brushes
- ¾- to 1-inch wood beads
- Coffee filters
- Glue stick
- Thin paper straws
- Hot-glue gun

1. For each topper, paint a wood bead white and glue two flattened coffee filters together at centers with glue stick; let dry.
2. Attach a wood bead, hole facing out, to center of doubled coffee filters using glue stick; let dry.
3. Fold one end of paper straw and attach to bottom of bead hole with hot glue.
4. Wrap filter around bead to form ghost shape. Create ghost face with black paint. When dry, reshape ghost if needed. Press straw bases into cake to decorate.

GHOSTLY GOODIES TREAT BAGS PAGE 19

MATERIALS

- Newspaper or kraft paper
- Drinking glass
- Colored cardstock
- White crafts paint and brush
- Silicone or plastic bowl scraper
- Paper punch
- Black paper treat bags
- Glue stick

1. Cover workspace with newspaper to protect surface. Trace drinking glass onto cardstock to create 3-inch circles.
2. Apply an arch-shape squirt of white paint to each cardstock circle and use a bowl scraper to pull paint down and fan out to create a ghost shape. Repeat to make as many ghosts as desired. Let paint dry and cut out cardstock circles.
3. Use a paper punch to create ghost eyes and mouths. Attach ghost circles onto black gift bags with glue stick; let dry.

DARING DINING NAPKIN HOLDERS PAGE 20

MATERIALS

- Black cardstock
- Printable house template (go to *BHG.com/JustTreats*)
- Cardboard tube
- Glue stick
- Colored cupcake liners
- ⅜-inch round wood beads
- Black paper-wrapped florists wire
- Black crafts paint and brush
- Hot-glue gun
- ¾-inch round paper punch

1. Cut cardstock into 3x6-inch strips. Trace template onto strips; cut out.
2. Trim cardboard tube into 3-inch-wide sections. Wrap cardstock house shapes around tube and attach using glue stick; let dry.
3. Flatten cupcake liners and use glue stick to attach wood beads, holes facing up, to center of liners.
4. Cut florists wire into 6-inch lengths and secure to bead holes with hot glue; let dry. Wrap liners around beads to form ghosts and paint ghost faces; let dry.
5. Use a paper punch to create windows in the house shapes. Hot-glue small florists wire pieces to back of windows for sashes. Hot-glue wired ghosts to interior of napkin rings.

HAUNTED HANGINGS HONEYCOMB GHOST PAGE 21

MATERIALS

- Printable ghost template (go to *BHG.com/JustTreats*)
- 3- to 5-inch paper honeycomb balls
- Cording
- Hot-glue gun
- Paper punch
- Black cardstock
- Crepe paper streamers
- Paper clips
- Glue stick

1. Use ghost template to trace onto closed honeycomb ball; cut out.
2. Cut cording into 8-inch piece, fold piece in half, and attach to top interior of honeycomb ball with hot glue. Open honeycomb and secure with hot glue to form ghost shape. Use paper punch and scissors to create ghost eyes and mouth from cardstock; hot-glue to ghost.
3. Cut crepe streamer into a 24-inch length and fold into quarters. Secure one folded edge with paper clips and cut fringe from opposite edge up to secured side, leaving ½ inch of edge uncut. Unfurl cut fringe, apply glue stick to uncut edge, and roll up to create paper tassel; let dry. Attach tassel to ghost with hot glue.

GHOSTLY GOODIES GARLAND PAGE 19

MATERIALS

- Cardboard
- White yarn
- Hot-glue gun
- Black mini pom-poms
- Embroidery needle
- Black cording

1. Cut out a 2x4-inch section of cardboard. For each ghost, wrap yarn around 4-inch side of cardboard 40 to 50 times, cut yarn end, and slip wrapped yarn loop off cardboard.
2. Cut one 4-inch length of yarn from skein, wrap around one end of yarn loop, 1-inch in, and tie with firm knot to create the head. Trim opposite ends of the looped yarn to free edges and create the ghost tassel body. Repeat to create roughly four ghosts for every foot of black cording you'll use. Hot-glue pom-poms on ghosts to create eyes and mouths.
3. Using an embroidery needle, thread 4 to 5 feet of cording through top of ghost heads to create garland. Tie cord ends to form hanging loops, hang, and spread ghosts evenly along garland length.

CREEPY CRAFTING PHANTOM PUMPKINS

PAGE 22

MATERIALS

- Waxed paper
- Chalk-finish paint and brush
- Faux pumpkins
- Printable ghost templates (go to *BHG.com/JustTreats*)
- Hot-glue gun
- Cotton macramé cord in desired colors
- Mini black pom-poms

1. Cover workspace with waxed paper and paint pumpkins. If needed, apply multiple coats of paint for even coverage.
2. Trace ghost templates onto painted pumpkins with pencil and add cursive text if desired.
3. Working in sections, retrace pencil lines with hot glue and place macramé cord on glue lines until covered.
4. For side-by-side ghost design, create ghosts on workspace using 2- to 3-inch sections of macramé cord. Working on waxed paper, for each ghost, fold the center cord piece in half and secure with hot glue. Continue wrapping and gluing additional layers of cord around the center piece to create ghost shapes to desired size. Hot-glue ghosts to pumpkin.
5. To finish, use hot glue to attach mini pom-poms as eyes and mouths.

CREEPY CRAFTING FABRIC GHOST PAGE 22

MATERIALS

- Waxed paper
- Jar or vase
- Plastic wrap
- Balloon
- Mod Podge
- Crafting bowl
- Crafts paint (optional)
- Fabric, tissue paper, or cheesecloth
- Plastic gloves
- Black cardstock
- Printable witch hat template (go to *BHG.com/JustTreats*)
- Glue stick
- LED candle (optional)

1. Cover workspace with waxed paper. Wrap jar with plastic wrap and stack balloon on top to form ghost mold. Blend 1 part Mod Podge and 1 part water in crafting bowl. Stir in crafts paint for color, if desired.
2. Cut an 18- to 24-inch circle from desired material. Wearing gloves, soak circle in Mod Podge mixture. Drape circle over ghost form, shaping as you go; let dry.
3. Cut out ghost eyes and mouth from cardstock. Trace and cut out witch hat template and two hat brims (with tabs).
4. Using glue stick, glue folded tab inside hat to form hat cone. Fold cut tabs up around cone base. Insert cone through one hat brim and glue tabs. Glue second brim below to hide tabs; let dry. Place hat on ghost, glue on eyes and mouth, and add LED candle inside if desired.

COUNTDOWN TO SPOOKY CALENDAR PAGE 23

MATERIALS

- 20-inch wire wreath frame
- Brown grocery bag
- Black and white crafts paint and brushes
- Hot-glue gun
- Thirty-one 2- to 3-inch black cardboard jewelry gift boxes
- Colored and black cardstock
- Crafts knife
- Glue stick
- Silicone or plastic bowl scraper
- Paper punch
- Number stamps and black stamp ink or black marker
- Printable window templates (go to *BHG.com/JustTreats*)
- 3D foam adhesive dots
- Wood alphabet letters
- Cording

1. Bend wreath frame into an oval. Cut grocery bag into 2-inch strips. Wrap strips around wreath frame until frame is covered, paint strips black; let dry.
2. Arrange gift boxes to find pleasing layout. Hot-glue box lids to wreath frame in desired design. Remove box bottoms, trace bottoms onto colored cardstock and cut out with crafts knife. Secure cutouts to box bottoms with glue stick and return box bottoms to their lids.
3. Create small ghosts out of cardstock (see Step 2 in "Ghostly Goodies Treat Bags," *opposite*). Cut ghosts out and use a paper punch to make eyes and mouth. Place a few paper ghosts on boxes. Stamp numbers 1 through 31 on boxes with ink or draw on with marker.
4. With crafts knife, trace window templates onto black cardstock and cut out in shape and size needed to fit boxes. Place window frames on colored box bottoms and attach with foam adhesive dots for a 3D look.
5. For "Happy Halloween" sign, paint wood letters and let dry. Secure letters and two white-painted ghosts that replace the "A's", to two lengths of cording with hot glue. Tie or glue in place.

Vintage SPIRIT

A party pro shares doable ways to elevate party decor with classic colors, designs that evoke nostalgia, and balloons galore.

WRITER JODY GARLOCK **PHOTOGRAPHERS** AUBREY TAIESE & MEGAN HILLERY **PRODUCER** BONJOUR FÊTE

BLOW-UP GLOW-UP

Balloons become the life of this party. "I love using balloons as the focal point because they're easy to work with and fill a space beautifully," says Rachel Huntington, founder and CEO of Bonjour Fête. "The trick is to use a variety of sizes." To create your decorations, tie the ends of inflated balloons into small bundles, then tie the bundles together using a long uninflated balloon. Tape or tie in extra balloons to fill gaps.

FIND RACHEL'S ARCH-BUILDING STEPS AT *BONJOURFETE.COM.*

ON A PEDESTAL

Let them eat cake—and let that cake double as decoration, *above*. Rachel likes food to match the party theme, even in simple ways such as the frosting color or adding a topper. "Presentation absolutely counts, but it doesn't have to be complicated," she says. "A pretty platter or cute serving ware can go a long way in making even the simplest snacks feel special."

TABLE TALK

"A statement piece for the table is important," Rachel says. A faux jack-o'-lantern topped with a tall hat, *right,* feels vintage. The classic black, orange, and white palette follows Rachel's rule of limiting colors to three to five for cohesiveness.

WHEN IT COMES TO HALLOWEEN CELEBRATIONS,

Rachel Huntington has always added her own brand of magic. When her two kids were young, she treated them to hot dogs wrapped to look like mummies. Before heading out to trick or treat, she tied a balloon on a ribbon around one of her kid's wrists so she could keep track of them in the throngs of costumed kids. The nights ended with friendly candy bartering and Rachel happily swooping up discarded sweets. "It all made for the perfect Halloween traditions," she says.

Today her kids are teens, and yet every day is a holiday for Rachel. Nine years ago, she shifted from working in film production to found Bonjour Fête, her Los Angeles-based business that has grown into a brand known for its party supplies and collections for virtually every holiday and occasion. "What began as a personal enthusiasm for hosting and designing festive gatherings quickly grew into something bigger as I realized how much I loved making every occasion feel special," Rachel says. (Her popular Pacific Palisades store remains closed due to damage sustained during the recent L.A. fires, but her products are available online.)

Halloween still rises to the top for her. "It's one of my favorite times of the year," Rachel says. Her party planning starts by choosing a versatile theme, sometimes inspired by designs that have vintage flavor. Colors are often classic black and orange, but she also likes twists, such as pastels. "I love layering colors, patterns, and textures in an unexpected way," she says. "I also believe that the little touches make the biggest impact, whether it's beautifully styled tableware or a surprise moment that delights guests."

Balloons are a given. "They help create that wow factor even when the rest of the decor is minimal," she says. She also likes food to make a statement by playing into the theme. For Rachel, the true mark of success is when a party has an effortless feel in an elevated look. To stay focused when planning, she suggests creating a list with categories such as guests, menu, decor, and timeline. "At the end of the day, it's about balance," she says. "A little prep goes a long way, but leave room for spontaneity. That's often where the magic happens."

OVERSIZE ITEMS CAN BE FUN TO USE AS PHOTO PROPS.

BOO-TIFUL AND BOUNTIFUL

What's black and white and orange all over? Rachel's color-coordinated, pattern-happy table. She typically starts with a graphic paper runner. "It's a low-entry cost to instantly add pattern," she says. The black-and-white "Boo" runner welcomes in swirls, stars, and stripes, plus black cats and pumpkins.

A COHESIVE COLOR PALETTE LENDS ITSELF TO LAYERS AND LAYERS OF FUN.

SHOP SAMPLER

When she's styling events or displays, Rachel taps into like-minded small businesses for sweet treats and other items to complement Bonjour Fête's curated party decor, favors, and themed products. She shares a few of her favorites.

- **SWEET LAUREL BAKERY** "Their chocolate cake is truly to die for—decadent, clean, and made with simple ingredients," Rachel says. Their seasonal cake styling and giftable baked goods always feel thoughtful and beautiful too. *sweetlaurel.com*

- **GRATITUDE COLLABORATIVE** Specializing in curated gift boxes of small-batch goods, artisanal treats, and more, this woman-owned business "consistently nails the details," Rachel says. The gift boxes work well for hosts as well as for guests wanting to send thanks after a party. *gratitudecollaborative.com*

- **GOLDBELLY** This marketplace features what Rachel deems the best small food businesses in the United States. "We especially love that they carry Flour Shop—their cakes are bursting with color and fun," she says. *goldbelly.com*

- **DARCY MILLER DESIGNS** Rachel calls party pro and illustrator Darcy Miller "the queen of meaningful celebrations." She adds, "From coloring place mats to customizable party favors, her designs make every guest feel special and every moment feel thoughtful." *darcymillerdesigns.com*

LAYERED STYLE

Vintage-inspired ghosts make their appearance known at a place setting that showcases Rachel's layered approach. A paper table runner crisscrossed under the main runner functions as a place mat. A black scallop-edge star plate makes a good decorative charger but could also be used as the main plate. A smaller complementary plate finishes off the look.

TREATS INCLUDE DIPPED CHOCOLATE SANDWICH COOKIES (OREOS) AND GHOST–THEME CAKE POPS.

"I THINK HALLOWEEN IS SO POPULAR BECAUSE IT'S A CREATIVE OUTLET. IF YOU WANT TO BE WEIRD, YOU CAN BE WEIRD. IF YOU WANT TO BE GLAM OR GOTHIC OR CAMPY, YOU CAN BE. HALLOWEEN CAN BE SO MANY THINGS."

— RACHEL HUNTINGTON, BONJOUR FÊTE FOUNDER AND CEO

SPIDERY SURPRISE

A wide-eyed spider, *below,* is more than a festive accent. It's a crepe paper "surprise ball" that can be unraveled to reveal items like jokes and friendship bracelets. "You don't have to go over the top with a party favor and send everyone home with a bag of goodies," Rachel says. "I like having one thing at a place setting that becomes the favor. It could be as simple as a note card where you write a special memory of a friend or a Halloween tradition you had as a child."

STARRING ATTRACTION

"No party is complete without a fun themed food moment because a celebration should be just as delicious as it is beautiful," Rachel says. She's firmly on Team Cake, preferring it over cupcakes (even though those get the edge for serving ease). The cake, *above* and *opposite*, coordinates with ghost-theme cake pops and dipped chocolate sandwich cookies.

BLACK MAGIC

When Rachel is on the prowl for a centerpiece, she tends to end up with two things: a cake pedestal and a Halloween-theme container, *right*. Filled with fresh flowers, the black cat bucket becomes a vase for a fall bouquet, and the cake pedestal raises the interest. Chains of black linking balloons carry the color overhead.

RESOURCES

Design Royale Ziegler of Bonjour Fête, *bonjourfete.com*

Balloons Pop Park City, *popparkcity.com*, and Bonjour Fête Balloons

Florals Riot Blooms, Instagram @riotblooms

Orange harlequin cake Holly Moore of Bonjour Fête

Cake pops, dipped cookies, and chocolate cake with white frosting Flour Shop, *flourshop.com*

SPELLBINDING SPREADS

WRITER ELLEN BOEKE **PHOTOGRAPHER** KELSEY HANSEN **FOOD STYLIST** KELSEY MOYLAN **PRODUCER** STEPHANIE HUNTER

Cast a spell over party guests with these delicious drinks paired with appetizer trays that celebrate the colors of the season.

STOUT & STORMY

In the Shadows

IN THE GLOOM
Sweet bites live in the darkness on this cookie platter. Purchased treats revel as black cats, witch hats, and bats. Spiders and puffs are easy to make from scratch. Melted chocolate, blackberries, and black candies are good embellishments. Use a toothpick to add touches of black gel food coloring to purchased frosting.

MAKE IT

RECIPES BEGIN ON PAGE 42.

White Magic

FRIENDLY GHOSTS
These sweet specters, *opposite,* will generate delight instead of fright. Much of the dessert tray is fix-ups of light-tone cookies such as madeleines, meringues, and rolled wafers. To complete the ensemble, scare up spooky marshmallow treats and ghostly boxed white cupcakes.

THREE TYPES OF CANNED MILK PLUS CREAM OF COCONUT ARE THE TRICK TO THIS EASY, CREAMY NOG.

BOO-LICIOUS COCONUT NOG

Pumpkin Patch Hues

JACK-O'-GRANITA

COLORS OF THE HARVEST

Shades of orange in pumpkins, squash, carrots, and the last of summer's bell peppers light up gardens and farmers markets this time of year. Bring them to the table in round and orange serving pieces as autumn treats, *opposite*. Finish the spread with crackers and dips in bright or rusty tones for variety and texture.

LOOK FOR A SMALL ROUND LOAF OF BREAD—THE KIND USED FOR BOWLS—AND HOLLOW IT OUT TO HOLD A CREAMY DIP.

Ghastly Greens

SWAMP THINGS

This savory assortment, *opposite,* gets a verdant glow from chopped fresh herbs, green veggie dippers, and other ghoulish treats. Roll up chicken salad in blanched greens and add olive eyes to protrude from the mummy wrappings. Fingerling potatoes live up to their name with a coating of pesto and sliced-almond fingernails. Gelatin-coated grape eyeballs add a tart and tangy element.

GREEN MONSTER SMASH

Purchased Fix-Ups

WITCH HAT BROWNIES

Purchase prepared brownies or bake a boxed mix. Cut brownies into triangles. Adorn each with a strip of black-tinted canned frosting near the bottom for a belt. Pipe on thin gray-tinted frosting buckles.

VAMPIRE BATS

These simple bats use two thin chocolate cookies per treat. Leave one whole and halve another. Attach halved cookie to the back with dabs of frosting for wings. Secure round black candies with frosting for eyes.

BLACK CAT CUTOUTS

HANDS ON 40 minutes **CHILL** 1 hour
BAKE 7 minutes per batch at 375°F

- ⅔ cup butter, softened
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 egg
- 1 Tbsp. milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1⅓ cups all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 recipe Vanilla Icing
- Black decorating sugar

1. In a large bowl beat butter with a mixer on medium to high 30 seconds. Add granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt. Beat until combined, scraping bowl as needed. Beat in egg, milk, and vanilla until combined. Beat in flour and cocoa powder. Divide dough in half. Cover and chill until dough is easy to handle, about 1 hour.
2. Preheat oven to 375°F. On a lightly floured surface roll half the dough at a time to ⅛ to ¼ inch thick. Using a floured 3-inch cat-shape cookie cutter, cut out dough. Place cutouts 1 inch apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.
3. Bake until edges are firm, 7 to 10 minutes. Transfer cookies to a wire rack; cool. Spread Vanilla Icing on cookies and sprinkle with black sugar. Let stand until icing is set. **Makes 36 cookies.**
VANILLA ICING In a bowl whisk together 6 cups powdered sugar, ⅓ cup corn syrup, ¼ cup milk, and 2 tsp. vanilla. If needed, add milk to reach spreading consistency. Tint with black gel food coloring.

POPPY SEED PUFFS

HANDS ON 25 minutes
COOL 5 minutes
BAKE 15 minutes at 325°F

- 1 cup butter, softened
- ¾ cup sifted powdered sugar
- 1 Tbsp. orange zest
- 1 Tbsp. orange juice
- 2⅔ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 egg whites
- ⅓ to ½ cup poppy seeds

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl beat butter with a mixer on medium to high 30 seconds. Add powdered sugar. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in orange zest and orange juice until combined. Beat in flour.
3. In a bowl whisk egg whites. Place poppy seeds in another bowl. Shape dough into 1¼-inch balls. Dip balls into egg whites, then roll in poppy seeds. Place balls 2 inches apart on prepared cookie sheets.
4. Bake until bottoms are set, about 15 minutes. Cool on cookie sheets 5 minutes. Transfer cookies to a wire rack; cool. **Makes 48 cookies.**

BLACKBERRY SPIDER PRINTS

HANDS ON 25 minutes
BAKE 10 minutes per batch at 350°F

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ⅛ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ cup butter, softened
- ⅔ cup packed brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp. milk
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- ¼ tsp. black gel food coloring (optional)
- ⅓ cup blackberry preserves
- 15 fresh blackberries, halved
- Melted chocolate

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl stir together flour, cocoa powder, and salt.
2. In a large bowl beat butter with a mixer on medium to high 30 seconds. Add brown sugar. Beat until combined, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Beat in milk, egg yolk, and vanilla until combined. Beat in flour mixture. Tint dough with black food coloring (if using). If necessary, cover and chill dough until easy to handle, about 1 hour.
3. Shape dough into ¾-inch balls. Place balls 1 inch apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Indent balls with your thumb or the back of a round ½-tsp. measuring spoon. Spoon about ½ tsp. blackberry preserves into each indentation.
4. Bake until bottoms are set, about 10 minutes. Cool on cookie sheets 1 minute. Transfer cookies to a wire rack; cool. Add a blackberry half to center of each cookie. Pipe melted chocolate on cookies to make spider legs. **Makes 30 cookies.**

STOUT & STORMY

HANDS ON 15 minutes **CHILL** 1 hour

- 1 cup (8 oz.) dark rum
- 1 recipe Ginger Simple Syrup
- ¾ cup (6 oz.) fresh lime juice
- 4 12-oz. bottles or cans milk stout or cream stout, chilled
- Black licorice sticks (optional)

In a pitcher combine rum, Ginger Simple Syrup, and lime juice. Add stout. Pour into individual glasses and garnish each with a black licorice stick. **Makes 8 servings.**
GINGER SIMPLE SYRUP In a small saucepan combine ¾ cup each chopped fresh ginger, sugar, and water. Bring to boiling, stirring to dissolve sugar. Remove from heat. Cover and chill at least 1 hour or overnight. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve; discard ginger. Makes 1 cup.
SINGLE SERVING In a tall chilled glass combine 2 Tbsp. (1 oz.) dark rum, 2 Tbsp. (1 oz.) Ginger Simple Syrup, and 1½ Tbsp. (¾ oz.) fresh lime juice. Top with chilled stout and black licorice stick (if using).

Purchased Fix-Ups

MERINGUE SPOOKS

Crunchy, light-as-air meringues make perfect ghostly figures. Dip the bottoms in melted white chocolate. Attach mini chocolate chip eyes with dabs of melted chocolate.

COOKIE-STICK SPECTERS

Dip rolled wafer cookies two-thirds of the way into melted white chocolate, then sprinkle with granulated sugar; let set. Add two dots of melted chocolate for eyes and let them stare.

PULL-APART CUPCAKE GHOST

Pick up a dozen unfrosted mini cupcakes or bake a batch using a boxed mix. Arrange them on a plate or platter in the shape of a ghost. Spread canned white frosting over the tops of the cupcakes, joining them into a single figure. Use melted dark chocolate to create ovals for eyes.

MADELEINE PHANTOMS

To make sweet ghosts, dust purchased madeleine cookies with powdered sugar and attach candy eyes atop dots of canned frosting.

MARSHMALLOW TREAT SPIRITS

HANDS ON 25 minutes
STAND 1 hour

- **Softened butter**
- ¼ **cup butter**
- 1 **10-oz. pkg. tiny marshmallows**
- 1 **13-oz. jar marshmallow creme**
- 2 **tsp. clear vanilla**
- ¼ **tsp. salt**
- 7 **cups crisp rice cereal**
- **Canned white frosting**
- **Coarse sugar**
- **White jimmies**

1. Line a 15x10-inch baking pan with foil, extending foil over edges of pan. Lightly grease foil with softened butter.
2. In a 6- to 8-qt. heavy Dutch oven melt the ¼ cup butter over low. Stir in marshmallows. Cook and stir until marshmallows are melted and smooth. Stir in marshmallow creme, vanilla, and salt until combined. Remove from heat. Add cereal to marshmallow mixture, stirring gently to coat.
3. Transfer cereal mixture to prepared baking pan. Using a buttered spatula or buttered waxed paper, press mixture firmly and evenly into pan. Let stand until set, about 1 hour.
4. Use edges of foil to lift uncut bars out of pan. Using a buttered 3- to 4-inch ghost-shape cookie cutter, cut out bars.
5. Spread a thin coating of frosting on top of cutouts. Top with coarse sugar and jimmies. **Makes 24 to 30 bars.**

BOO-LICIOUS COCONUT NOG

HANDS ON 10 minutes
CHILL 4 hours

- 1 **14-oz. can cream of coconut**
- 1 **14-oz. can unsweetened coconut milk**
- 1 **14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk**
- 1 **12-oz. can low-fat evaporated milk**
- ¾ **cup (6 oz.) dark rum**
- 1 **Tbsp. vanilla**
- 2 **tsp. ground cinnamon**
- 2 **Tbsp. sugar**
- **Whipped cream (optional)**

1. In a large blender combine cream of coconut, coconut milk, sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk, rum, vanilla, and cinnamon. Cover and blend until well-combined and frothy. Transfer to a pitcher. Cover and chill 4 to 24 hours.
2. Place sugar in a shallow dish. Moisten the edges of 6-oz. glasses with water or additional rum. Dip rims in sugar. Set aside until dry.
3. Whisk coconut nog before serving. Carefully fill prepared glasses with nog. Top with whipped cream if you like. **Makes 10 servings.**
NOTE For a nonalcoholic option, just omit the rum.

Purchased Fix-Ups

HUMMUS PUMPKIN

Create a mini pumpkin by slicing the top off an orange bell pepper. Remove the seeds and membranes, then fill with purchased roasted red pepper hummus.

DIPPERS

Make your nibbler board visually stunning with orange dippers such as carrot sticks, bell pepper strips, and cheese crackers.

PUMPKIN-CHEDDAR CHEESE BALL WITH SAGE

HANDS ON 15 minutes
CHILL 4 hours

- **2 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened**
- **2 cups finely shredded sharp cheddar cheese (8 oz.)**
- **½ of a 15-oz. can pumpkin (¾ cup)**
- **¼ cup butter, softened**
- **2 Tbsp. chopped fresh sage**
- **½ tsp. smoked paprika**
- **¼ tsp. garlic powder**
- **¼ tsp. kosher salt**
- **¼ tsp. freshly cracked black pepper**

1. In a medium bowl combine cream cheese, 1¼ cups of the cheddar cheese, the pumpkin, butter, sage, paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Beat with a mixer on medium to high until fluffy, scraping bowl as needed. Cover and chill 4 to 24 hours.
2. Place cheese mixture in the center of a large piece of plastic wrap. Pull the plastic wrap up around cheese mixture and shape into a ball. Remove plastic wrap and roll cheese ball in remaining ¾ cup cheddar cheese. If you like, sprinkle with additional paprika and fresh sage. **Makes 24 servings.**
TO SHAPE INTO A PUMPKIN After rolling the cheese ball in the remaining cheddar cheese, wrap the ball in another piece of plastic wrap. Place a few rubber bands vertically around the cheese ball to form ridges like a pumpkin. Chill until firm, 30 minutes to 1 hour. Remove rubber bands and unwrap. Add a sugar snap pea and sage leaves to the top for a pumpkin stem and leaves.

CREAMY BUTTERNUT SQUASH DIP

HANDS ON 30 minutes
ROAST 35 minutes at 400°F

- **1 2¼-lb. butternut squash**
- **4 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped**
- **2 Tbsp. olive oil**
- **½ tsp. kosher salt**
- **1 15-oz. can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained**
- **4 oz. goat cheese (chèvre)**
- **½ cup grated Parmesan cheese**
- **2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**
- **1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme leaves, plus sprigs for garnish**
- **Small round bread loaf**

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Halve and peel squash and remove seeds. Cut squash into 1-inch cubes. Toss cubes with garlic, oil, and salt. Spread on a rimmed baking sheet. Roast until tender, about 35 minutes.
2. Transfer squash to a food processor. Add beans, goat cheese, Parmesan, lemon juice, and chopped thyme. Process 30 seconds. Scrape sides of bowl; blend until very smooth, 30 seconds more. Let dip cool.
3. Slice off top of loaf. Pull out bread in center, leaving a ½-inch edge. (Reserve removed bread for another use.) Spoon dip into hollow loaf. Garnish with fresh thyme sprigs. **Makes 3 cups.**

CHEDDARY PIMIENTO PUMPKIN

HANDS ON 15 minutes **CHILL** 4 hours

- **3 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (12 oz.)**
- **⅔ cup mayonnaise**
- **1 4-oz. jar diced pimientos, drained**
- **1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 tsp. yellow mustard**
- **¼ tsp. garlic powder**
- **Cornichon (optional)**
- **Fresh parsley sprig (optional)**

In a medium bowl stir together cheese, mayonnaise, pimientos, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, and garlic powder, mashing with the back of a spoon as you mix (mixture will be chunky). Spoon mixture into a small serving dish (preferably orange or red), mounding it slightly. If you like, add a cornichon as a stem and a fresh parsley vine. Cover and chill 4 to 24 hours. **Makes about 3 cups.**

JACK-O'-GRANITA

HANDS ON 15 minutes **COOL** 30 minutes
FREEZE 6 hours **STAND** 5 minutes

- **1½ cups orange juice**
- **¼ cup sugar**
- **¼ cup fresh lemon or lime juice**
- **1 medium orange, peeled, sectioned, and finely chopped**
- **1 small lemon or lime, peeled, sectioned, and finely chopped**
- **Orange slices (optional)**
- **Green licorice strings (optional)**

1. For syrup, in a small saucepan combine orange juice and sugar. Cook and stir over medium until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat. Stir in lemon juice; set syrup aside to cool 30 minutes.
2. Stir orange and lemon pieces into syrup. Pour mixture into an 8-inch square baking dish. Freeze, uncovered, 2 hours, stirring and scraping frozen mixture off bottom and sides of dish every 30 minutes. Cover and freeze, without stirring, until firm, 4 hours.
3. To serve, let granita stand at room temperature 5 to 10 minutes. Use the tines of a fork to scrape across the surface of the granita. Spoon into chilled glasses. If you like, garnish each glass with an orange slice and a green licorice string. **Makes 4 servings.**

Purchased Fix-Ups

FINGERLING FINGERS AND PESTO

These creepy fingers are quick to make. Boil whole fingerling potatoes in salted water until tender; drain. Toss with purchased pesto. Use a sharp knife to cut slits in the ends of potatoes and insert sliced almonds as fingernails.

CHICKEN SALAD MUMMIES

Spoon chicken salad from the deli onto collard greens or green cabbage leaves. Roll up leaves, folding in sides to enclose like a burrito. Cut additional leaves into strips to wrap around the outside of the roll for the full mummy effect. Add caper-stuffed green olives for eyes.

To make collard leaves easy to roll, cut the stems off the greens. Spread leaves on a work surface, shiny sides down. Use a vegetable peeler to shave thick veins until even with leaves. Place two leaves at a time on a paper towel; microwave 30 seconds. Repeat with remaining leaves.

If using cabbage, fill a very large pot halfway with water. Bring to boiling; reduce heat until water is simmering. Insert a large serving fork into the cabbage core and dunk whole cabbage in boiling water 1 to 2 minutes or until outer leaves soften. Remove cabbage from pot, cool slightly, and pull or cut off softened outer leaves. Repeat dunking and peeling leaves away from core. (Thicker inner leaves will take 2 to 3 minutes to soften.) Trim thick veins as with collard greens.

HERBAL BUTTERMILK DIP

START TO FINISH 10 minutes

- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup buttermilk
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh chives
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh dill
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon
- ½ tsp. onion powder
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- ⅛ tsp. kosher salt
- Olive oil
- Green vegetables, such as cucumbers, snow pea pods, and green beans

In a small bowl whisk together yogurt and buttermilk. Stir in chives, parsley, dill, garlic, tarragon, onion powder, pepper, and salt. Spoon into a serving dish and top with a drizzle of olive oil and additional chopped herbs. Serve with vegetable dippers.

SOUR CANDIED GRAPE EYEBALLS

HANDS ON 30 minutes
CHILL 2 hours

- 1 3-oz. pkg. lime-flavor gelatin
- 60 large green grapes
- 2 to 3 Tbsp. fresh lemon or lime juice
- Canned white frosting
- Candy eyes

Line a tray with waxed paper. Pour gelatin powder into a shallow dish. Insert a toothpick into the stem end of one grape and dip it into lemon juice. Let excess juice drip off, then roll grape in gelatin powder until evenly coated. Place on prepared tray and carefully remove toothpick. Repeat with remaining grapes. Use dots of frosting to attach candy eyes as desired. Chill or freeze grapes at least 2 hours before serving. **Makes 10 servings.**

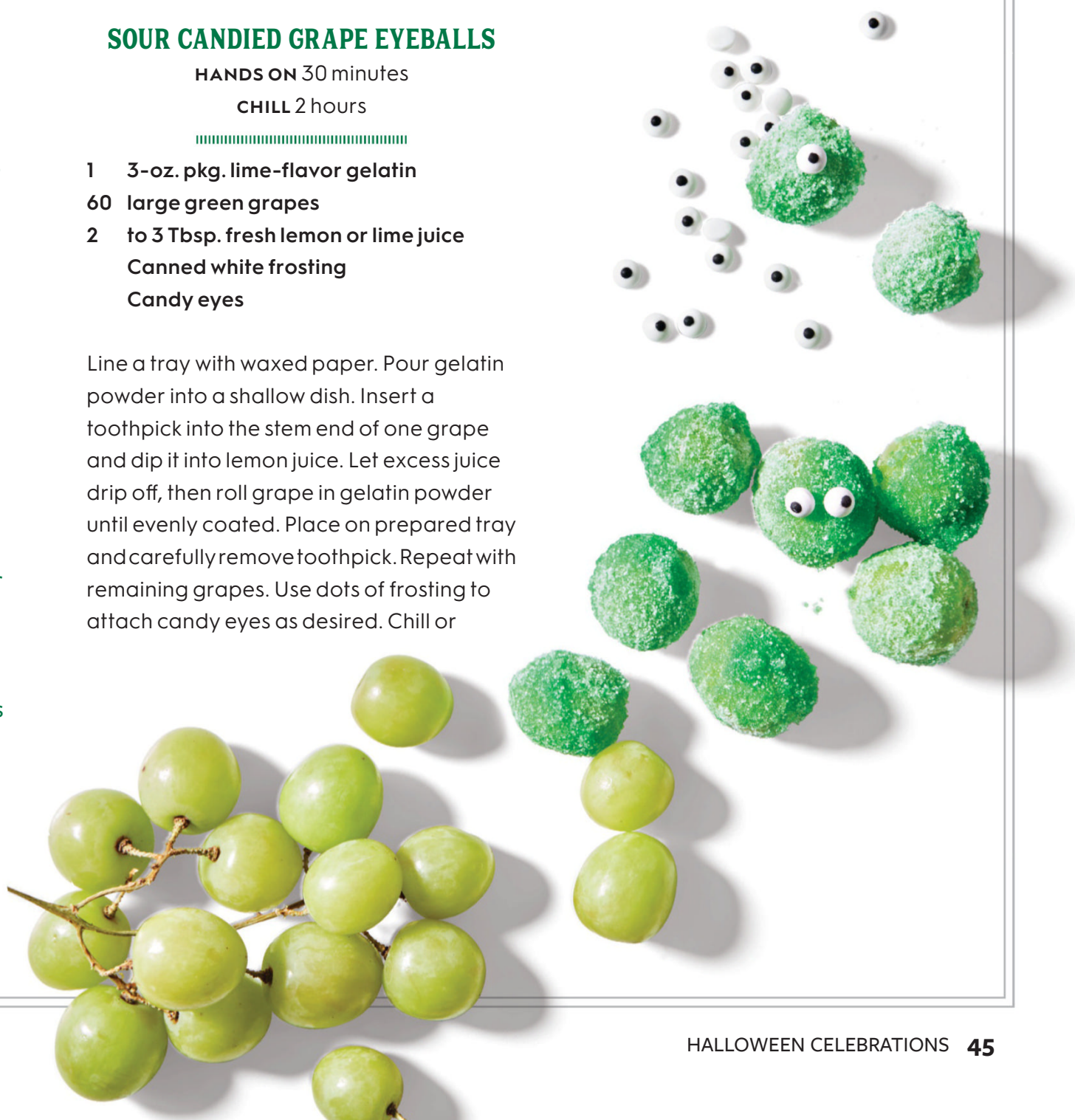
NOTE For longer storage, freeze grapes then transfer them to an airtight container. Cover and freeze up to 1 month.

GREEN MONSTER SMASH

START TO FINISH 10 minutes

- 6 cucumber slices
- 8 seedless green grapes
- ¼ cup lightly packed fresh mint leaves
- 3 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- Cucumber strips (optional)
- Ginger beer or ginger ale, chilled

In a food processor or high-power blender combine cucumber slices, grapes, mint leaves, and lime juice. Process until nearly smooth. If you like, wrap cucumber strips around the inside of tall glasses. Pour cucumber mixture into glasses and top with ginger beer; stir gently. **Makes 2 servings.**



WRITER LACEY HOWARD
PHOTOGRAPHER ADAM ALBRIGHT

SWEET & SPOOKY Social

Stephanie Hanna goes all out for her daughters and their friends to enjoy a frightfully fun (but not scary) party.

WOW WELCOME

Homeowner Stephanie Hanna and her husband, Rusty, welcome party-goers with a ghostly display, *opposite*. He created a 12-foot-tall arch out of PVC pipe; she covered it with spray-painted pastel, carved foam pumpkins.

SET THE SCENE

The party backdrop includes a balloon arch, a panel of square sequins, and a coffin-shape bookcase. "We always do something fun for Halloween," Stephanie says. Silver streamers and balloons add shimmer. "And disco balls! They are a signature for my decor," she says. "They give a magical feeling."

SPOOKY COOKIES

Stephanie's sweet char-boo-terie secret weapon is adorably decorated cookies by Royally Iced Sweets (Instagram @royallyiced). "I start with a marble board and place all the cookies in a layout I like," she says. "I fill in the gaps with textural things like caramel nibs, coconut, tiny hard marshmallows, and white chocolate chips. And macarons! They are always tasty and available in seasonal colors."

Stephanie Hanna starts prepping for the holidays midsummer, focusing first on her favorite—Halloween. "I love envisioning and sketching out what I want to do, then seeing it come to life," she says. "With Halloween, it is what you make it."

Stephanie makes it a celebration of creativity and whimsy with a pretty-in-pink color scheme. "My palette isn't typical for Halloween, and that is deliberate," she says. "I want it to be feminine and sophisticated and to flow with my existing decor."

The trick, she says, is to add black. "Any palette with touches of black becomes a little bit spooky."

The weekend before trick-or-treating, she hosts a party for her daughters, McKenzie and Maven, and their friends.

"For the party decor, I support a lot of small shops—moms doing side hustles and making beautiful things," says Stephanie, who is on Instagram (@stephaniehannahome).

But the setting is the last thing on the kids' minds. What they care about are the snacks and not being bored. "At a kids party, I always have movement—to burn off the sugar high—and something they can craft," Stephanie says. "And I send them on their way with a favor. It doesn't have to be complicated."

PARTY POSSE
Stephanie's daughters, McKenzie and Maven, invite their friends for festivities that suit all ages. The boo crew, *above,* includes (clockwise from top left) Kylie, Stephanie, McKenzie, Kameron, Maven, Celene, and Piper the Bernedoodle.

"I GET A LOT OF INSPIRATION FROM SMALL SHOPS, AND I LIKE TO LIFT THEM UP."
— HOMEOWNER STEPHANIE HANNA

FRIENDLY NIBBLES

Stephanie offsets the sweet offerings with salty ones like popcorn served in food boxes designed as haunted houses, *above*. Bat-shape boxes with oversize googly eyes, *right,* are jelly bean-filled party favors.

POTION POSITION

Stephanie personalizes each place setting, *above right,* with an expertly decorated cookie and a playful ribbon wand. A woven place mat, pink laminate plate, and conversation-bubble paper plate form the setting. Bubblegum pink cotton candy fills skull-shape clear plastic cups she scored at a dollar store.

CANDY COUNTDOWN

Why should Christmas get all the joyful anticipation? "It's really fun to do a countdown to Halloween with kids, right?" Stephanie asks. It doesn't have to be an official calendar like her Sleeps 'til Halloween version. "Even something as simple as a chalkboard or paper sign gets them excited," she says.

ENCHANTED ESCAPADE

The table setting delights with sparkling accessories. A faux jack-o'-lantern painted the perfect pink holds a centerpiece of seasonal florals in a muted palette. Cheesecloth in the same rosy hue provides spiderweb vibes. A garland of small skulls and disco balls tops the table runner.

SWEET SPOT
Stephanie ordered this cake with icing ghosts and stars. She added the topper and put the party-ready confection on a pedestal.

"DISCO BALLS! THEY ARE A SIGNATURE FOR MY DECOR. THEY GIVE A MAGICAL FEELING WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT."

— STEPHANIE HANNA

AMUSEMENT FOR ALL

"Because my girls are almost five years apart in age," Stephanie says of Maven and McKenzie, *above,* "I'm an expert at entertaining kids of all ages." She lets both girls invite friends for the parties, and she doesn't plan separate activities for the age groups. Rather, she comes up with things like crafts or games that everyone can do together. "The older ones love to help the littles," she says.

SLITHERIN' FUN

Kameron's cookie place card, *above,* features an icing snake. Though artfully decorated cookies make for Insta-worthy party decor, kids appreciate the sweet taste more than the visual. If you fear your icing skills fall short, make cookie decorating one of the party activities and let the children create their own treats.

Cupcake COLLAGES

WRITER ELLEN BOEKE **PHOTOGRAPHER** KELSEY HANSEN **FOOD STYLIST** ANNIE PROBST **PRODUCER** STEPHANIE HUNTER

BAKE CUPCAKES IN PAPER OR FOIL LINERS TO MAKE IT EASY FOR TRICK-OR-TREATERS TO GRAB ONE (OR TWO) BY THE BASE. NO CUTTING REQUIRED.

Create sweetly spooky “cakes” with cupcakes bunched into simple designs and topped with frosting and wickedly easy embellishments.

JACK-O'-LANTERN

You'll need two kinds of cupcakes for this cutie—yellow for the shape and a few chocolate ones to create three-dimensional eyes and a nose. Add the goofy grin using a paper stencil and chocolate sprinkles.

FRAIDY-CAT

Choose chocolate (or devil's food!) cupcakes for this frosted feline. Adding black food coloring to white frosting creates an authentic black cat look.

SELECT A COLORFUL TRAY TO SET THE SCENE FOR YOUR BLACK CAT CREATION.

FULL MOON RISING
Group yellow cupcakes into an orb for a dramatic full moon. Bright tinted frosting and glittering golden decorating sugar light the way.

SUGAR COOKIE BATS FLAP ACROSS THE MOON'S SHIMMERING GLOW. LOOK FOR COOKIE CUTTERS IN MULTIPLE SIZES FOR THESE ADORNMENTS.

BARE BONES
White vanilla cupcakes, white frosting, white sugar, and black licorice are all you need for this minimalist skull design. Bone appétit!

YOU'LL SPEND SOME TIME ON THIS FEATHERED FELLOW SINCE HIS IMPRESSIVE BELLY REQUIRES ROWS OF SLICED ALMONDS.

WHOO ARE YOU?

Arrange cupcakes in an hourglass for this shapely owl. Use two more for eyes set off with glowing green frosting. Chocolate graham crackers form the tufted crown.

WIZARD HAT
Amass chocolate cupcakes into a conical shape for a spellbinding cap. Colored sugars dust it with magic, and sour strip candies fashion the belt.

CONJURE UP EDIBLE STAR CUPCAKE TOPPERS ONLINE OR FIND THEM IN THE CAKE-DECORATING SECTION OF CRAFTS STORES.

A SIMPLE SPELL

Cupcakes and frosting are the foundation for these collage cakes. Make cupcakes from scratch or a boxed cake mix—be sure to use paper or foil liners—or purchase them. Arrange cupcakes according to the templates shown next to the images. Canned frosting is easy to use, or you can make a favorite buttercream. Tint the frosting as needed, and spread it over the grouped cupcakes as if they are a single cake. Decorate as directed.

JACK-O'-LANTERN

- **28 yellow cupcakes**
- **2 to 3 cups white frosting**
- **Orange and green gel food coloring**
- **Green and orange decorating sugar**
- **2 chocolate cupcakes**
- **½ cup chocolate frosting**
- **Chocolate sprinkles**

1. Arrange yellow cupcakes on a tray as shown on *page 55.* Place a spoonful of frosting in a small bowl and the remaining frosting in a medium bowl. Tint large amount of frosting orange and small amount green. Transfer green frosting to a piping bag fitted with a leaf tip. Pipe green frosting on the top two cupcakes to resemble a stem; sprinkle with green sugar. Spread orange frosting over remaining cupcakes to resemble a pumpkin, using an offset spatula to make vertical ridges; sprinkle with orange sugar.
2. Cut tops off chocolate cupcakes. Use a round cutter to cut out a portion of the tops for eyes. Cut a triangle nose from one of the cupcake bottoms. Spread chocolate frosting on eyes and nose; coat with chocolate sprinkles. Add eyes and nose to pumpkin.
3. Draw a gap-toothed mouth on a piece of paper; cut it out with scissors. Carefully place stencil on pumpkin and fill in mouth with chocolate sprinkles; remove stencil.

FRAIDY-CAT

- **32 chocolate cupcakes**
- **2 to 3 cups white frosting**
- **Black gel food coloring**
- **1 chocolate graham cracker, cut into two small triangles**
- **Black decorating sugar**
- **Orange and pink candied fruit slices**
- **White paper straws**

1. Arrange cupcakes on a tray as shown on *page 56.* Tint frosting black. Spread frosting over cupcakes to resemble a cat. Frost two graham cracker triangles; add to head for ears. Sprinkle all with black sugar.
2. Trim orange fruit slices into half-ovals; add to head for eyes. Add black frosting to centers of eyes. Trim a pink fruit slice into a triangle; add to head for nose. Add straws for whiskers.

FULL MOON RISING

- **14 yellow cupcakes**
- **2½ to 3 cups white frosting**
- **Yellow and black gel food coloring**
- **Yellow and black decorating sugar**
- **Sugar cookie bats**

Arrange cupcakes on a tray as shown on *page 57.* Place 2 cups frosting in a medium bowl and the remaining frosting in a small bowl. Tint the large amount of frosting yellow and the small amount black. Spread yellow frosting over cupcakes to resemble a moon; sprinkle with yellow sugar. Frost sugar cookie bats with black frosting; sprinkle with black sugar. Place cookie bats on and around moon. We sprinkled our tray with black and yellow sugar to resemble a night sky.

BARE BONES

- **21 white cupcakes**
- **2 to 3 cups white frosting**
- **White decorating sugar**
- **Black licorice wheels**

Arrange cupcakes on a tray as shown on *page 58.* Spread frosting over cupcakes to resemble a skull; sprinkle with sugar. Add licorice wheels to skull for eyes, nose, and mouth, unwinding and trimming licorice as needed.

WHOO ARE YOU?

- **31 chocolate cupcakes**
- **1 cup white frosting**
- **Green gel food coloring**
- **2½ to 3 cups chocolate frosting**
- **1 chocolate graham cracker, cut into two small triangles**
- **Green decorating sugar**
- **Chocolate sprinkles**
- **2 green gummy rings**
- **6 Brazil nuts or cashews**
- **1 to 2 cups sliced almonds**
- **Gold sour belt candy, cut into triangle**

1. Arrange 29 cupcakes on a tray as shown on *page 59.* Tint white frosting green. Spread 2–2½ cups chocolate frosting over cupcakes to resemble an owl. Spread green frosting in circles as shown for eyes. Cut tops off remaining two cupcakes. Place on green frosting. Add a dab of chocolate frosting and top with gummy rings to complete.
2. Spread ½ cup chocolate frosting on forehead to give owl a scowl. Frost two graham cracker triangles with chocolate frosting; add to head for ear tufts. Sprinkle green sugar over green frosting and chocolate sprinkles over chocolate frosting.
3. Add nuts to bottom of cake for feet. Starting at the bottom, arrange sliced almonds in rows to fill owl belly. Add belt candy for beak; secure with frosting.

WIZARD HAT

- **23 chocolate cupcakes**
- **2 to 3 cups white frosting**
- **Black gel food coloring**
- **Black decorating sugar**
- **Sour belt candy, desired color and white**
- **Edible star cupcake toppers**
- **White sparkle sugar**
- **Edible gold sprinkles**

1. Arrange cupcakes on a tray as shown *opposite.* Tint frosting black. Spread frosting over cupcakes to resemble a hat. Sprinkle black sugar over all exccept the bottom portion.
2. Lay colored belt candy across bottom of hat, trimming white colored candy into a buckle. Add star toppers to cake above belt. Sprinkle white sugar and gold sprinkles below belt.

Dark REPAST

Capturing the essence of Halloween, blogger Harmony Lynn Goodson brews up an elegant tabletop and a sophisticated meal.

WRITER & PHOTOGRAPHER HARMONY LYNN GOODSON

WHEN DESIGNING A HALLOWEEN TABLE FOR A GATHERING, I HAVE trouble choosing between spine-tingling and spectacular. Luckily, I don't have to choose. Moody colors and cozy dishes with subtle spooky hints of Halloween create an elegant and refined table. And luxurious golden touches in candlesticks, flatware, and glasses make my table shimmer.

I set the scene with black pumpkins, tall tapers, and dishes. Dark-color flowers and foliage—nestled among a scattering of green, gold, dark red, and purple fall fruit—come together as an artistic table runner. For deadly cool arrangements, I let my flowers and leaves dry out for about a week before I cloak the table in natural beauty.

Party-friendly foods and cocktails with gleefully gloomy appearances offer easy cooking and serving with a thematic fit. Veiny blue cheese and creamy Brie star on a platter filled with sliced sausages, fresh and dried fruits, nuts, and dark brown crackers with plenty of texture. Even the rich color of buckwheat honey suits the dreamy mood.

My favorite soup is a creamy cheddar broccoli classic, and I give it a smoky flavor twist that's perfect for the occasion. To suit the haunting ambience, a crowd-pleasing signature drink features the fall-favorite apple cider. (I let the kids in on the fun with a mocktail version that leaves out the liquor.) It's a winning combination for all who are welcome to my table.

BUMPS OF FUN
The sweetness in Blackberry-Brie Crostini is a honey drizzle. A black serving tray and bed of fresh sage leaves set off the creamy Brie and blackberries atop toasted baguette slices.

MAKE IT

RECIPES ON PAGE 66.

CHILLING CHARCUTERIE

Use a black board as the serving tray and make blue and Brie cheeses the focal points. Surround them with dark buckwheat honey, sliced sausage, assorted fruits, and nuts. For an aesthetically eerie look, I use blackberries, figs, plums, and purple grapes that match the moody color scheme. Tuck plastic skeletal hands into the mix for a touch of creepiness.

DRAMATIC DINNER TABLE

Pops of gold on pumpkins, glassware, and utensils elevate the dark decor. Spray-painted and personalized mini pumpkins mark the place settings. Paint each pumpkin matte black and let dry, then sketch a guest's name in pencil and finish using a metallic gold permanent marker.

STIR-CRAZY SURPRISE

Smoked cheddar in this creamy broccoli soup gives your taste buds an autumn buzz. I recommend fresh broccoli, but frozen works too. Grate leftover broccoli over the top as a pleasing garnish.

SMOKED CHEDDAR & BROCCOLI SOUP

- ½ cup unsalted butter
- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 cups frozen broccoli florets
- 1 14.5-oz. can chicken broth
- 1 lb. smoked cheddar cheese, cubed
- 2 cups half-and-half
- ⅓ cup cornstarch
- Fresh or cooked frozen broccoli florets (optional)

1. In a 5- to 6-qt. soup pot, melt butter over medium-high. Cook onion in butter 5 minutes or until translucent. Stir in the 4 cups broccoli and the chicken broth. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cover and cook until broccoli is very tender, about 15 minutes.

2. Stir cheese into broccoli mixture. Cook, stirring constantly, until cheese is melted. Stir in half-and-half.

3. In a small bowl, stir cornstarch into 1 cup water until fully dissolved; stir into soup mixture. Cook and stir over medium until thickened and bubbly. Cook and stir 2 minutes more. If you like, garnish each serving with additional broccoli.

GHOSTLY APPLE COCKTAIL

- 2 oz. (¼ cup) apple cider
- 2 oz. (¼ cup) caramel vodka
- 1 oz. (2 Tbsp.) butterscotch schnapps
- Red apple slice

Combine all ingredients except the apple slice in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake to mix and strain into a glass. Garnish with an apple slice.

BLACKBERRY-BRIE CROSTINI

PICTURED ON PAGE 63.

- 8 1-inch-thick baguette slices
- 3 to 4 oz. Brie cheese, rind removed if desired and thinly sliced
- ½ cup fresh blackberries
- 2 Tbsp. honey

Preheat oven to 350°F. Arrange baguette slices on a baking sheet. Bake 7 minutes, turning once. Top with Brie slices. Bake 2 minutes more or until cheese is softened; spread slightly. Top with berries and drizzle with honey.

STRANGE SIPS

To garnish Ghostly Apple Cocktails, slice apples vertically to maintain their shape. Cut slits in each from the bottom of the apple to the center seeds and slip on the rim of the glass for dramatic flair.

DRY ICE CREATES A DRAMATIC FOGGY EFFECT, BUT TELL GUESTS TO AVOID THE DRY ICE WHEN ENJOYING THE COCKTAIL. USE PROPER CARE WHEN HANDLING DRY ICE.

LET'S GO WILD

Take a kids Halloween party outside. Mix warty pumpkins, otherworldly succulents, and natural elements with spooky webs, fake spiders, and wicked-fun costumes for a thrilling day to remember.

WRITER & PRODUCER SAMANTHA S. THORPE **PHOTOGRAPHER** ADAM ALBRIGHT

CAST A SPELL

Fill a crate with all the ingredients needed to make costumes. Toss in masks, capes, bug and floral headbands, feather boas, spider bracelets, and witch hats. The kids can mix and match the pieces to create their own silly or spooky getups. A bonus: You can pull out the box anytime they want to relive the fun.

Falling leaves crackle underfoot as flowers wilt and wither and critters scurry to find warm places. For Casey Lawrence, who shares her gardening and lifestyle tips on The Lawrence Garden Farm channel on YouTube, the outdoors is the ultimate backdrop for a kids Halloween party.

"A party just feels better outside when you can experience nature and create a magical experience where the kids can touch and feel so many things—and just run and have fun," she says.

Casey plans her family's Halloween bash around natural elements found in their yard. There's a science station to check out flower petals and bugs under a magnifying glass and a table where everyone can share in making terrariums with sticks, stones, acorns, and other yard staples. She stocks inexpensive crafts supplies, such as googly eyes, fake spiders, faux feathers, decorative sand, and squishy pom-poms in neon colors.

"You can choose a few Halloween-theme things at the store that fit your budget, and the rest you can collect from the outdoors," Casey says.

Even the food can be super simple. Think grapes, crazy-color carrots, cut-out sugar cookies, and a wicked potion made from water and frozen strawberries. Cap the party off with s'mores around a firepit. As Casey says, "It's all about letting the kids get goofy!"

SPOOKY SPECTACLE

A vintage witchy cauldron set in a firepit, *right*, helps create a ghostly hangout. Casey Lawrence bound grasses into bundles with rubber bands and hung them from hooks screwed into the tall frames anchored behind the benches. The rustling grasses overhead accompany spellbinding story time and s'mores.

S'MORES TIME IS THE RIGHT TIME TO LET EACH KID TELL THEIR SPOOKIEST GHOST STORY.

MIX–AND–MATCH REAL PUMPKINS WITH PURCHASED GLAM ONES FOR THE PERFECT PARTY SHINE.

“WHEN THE KIDS ARE OUTSIDE, THEY CAN EXPLORE. THEY CAN SMELL AND TOUCH THINGS. THE GARDEN FEELS LIKE IT’S JUST FOR THEM AND THEIR FRIENDS.”

— HOMEOWNER CASEY LAWRENCE

FANGTASTIC DRINKS

Brew up a beverage station, *opposite,* featuring a tasty potion. Fill a pitcher or drink dispenser with ice water and 16 to 32 ounces of frozen strawberries. “The more berries you put in, the redder it gets,” Casey says. Add in orange slices or candy eyeballs for a more spine-chilling quencher.

FRIGHTFUL TREATS

Serve up finger foods at a ghoulish buffet, *above*. Stack dishes alongside pumpkins, grapes, figs, hairy rambutans, and mini carrots on pedestals. Frosted sugar cookie cutouts add a sweet treat. For a dramatic bouquet, Casey mixes ‘Crane Pink’ flowering kale with skeletal catalpa branches.

HANDS-ON THRILLS

Bring out a fun competitive spirit in your science spot, *above*, with contests and activities to engage young scientists. In this kid-friendly apothecary, nature becomes the entertainment. Give prizes to kids who race to identify a bug or plant using magnifying glasses and field guides. Reward them for the coolest—or creepiest—homemade "potions."

SCIENCE LAB

Casey and her husband, Jason, created a science shed, *right*, but it's easy to convert a folding table or potting bench into a mini lab. "Set out different-size jars, spoons, magnifying glasses, and bug catchers and just watch how creative the kids get," Casey says. Kids can fill bottles with soil, herbs, leaves, or anything else they want to cork.

MAGICAL ESCAPE

Whether it's a science experiment, *above,* an artistic craft, or an edible concoction, it's all about experimenting. "When the kids are creating something, they not only have fun, but also get to have an experience and bring home something they made themselves," Casey says.

"THIS IS ONE HALLOWEEN PARTY OUR KIDS JUST WANT MORE OF."

— CASEY LAWRENCE

HERBOLOGY CHARMS

The kids can join forces to conjure up terrariums, *above*. Set out bowls loaded with sticks, acorn tops, herbs, and flowers. Trick them out with decorative sand, faux feathers, fake spiders, bat stickers, and fuzzy pom-poms.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Cacti and succulents like kalanchoe and 'Blue Chalksticks' senecio, *right*, take on a supernatural aura when adorned with Halloween accessories. Let kids plant the not-too-spiky ones on their own; everyone can add stickers to their name tag or tuck in a googly eye for a flourish.

PARTING GIFT

Potted plants, *below,* make ideal take-home treasures. Spray-paint basic 3-inch terra-cotta pots found at crafts stores with a midnight-black hue. Use chalkboard plant tags or simple crafts sticks to label each container with a guest's name.

LITTLE HOUSE, BIG OASIS

A small house on a double lot with only an old shed and a huge cedar tree in the yard morphed into an outdoor retreat. The backyard beckons friends and family, especially come fall.

WRITER BEV RIVERS **PHOTOGRAPHER** JOHN GRANEN **STYLIST** JANNA LUFKIN

THE BAR IS OPEN

Fresh apple cider is served from this table, *left,* which was handmade by homeowner Tanner Williams. The cedar tree's five trunks create a shady shelter for guests to enjoy a drink and delicious treats.

PATHWAY TO FUN

A crisp white fence and walkway lined with pumpkins, *above,* announce it's time to celebrate. Homeowners Kara and Tanner Williams revamped the home's interior at the same time they worked on the exterior. Kara says the remodeled main floor is wide open, light, and wonderful for entertaining.

NEW LIFE FOR AN OLD SHED

With new paint and a few other updates, the original shed plays a big part in every party. The fireplace surround, salvaged from a home in Arkansas, stays outside year-round.

A VINTAGE WINDOW IS THE PERFECT BACKDROP—IF NO ONE MINDS THE HUGE SPIDER!

KARA WILLIAMS' MOTHER ASKS HER THE SAME QUESTION EVERY OCTOBER. "She'll call me and say, 'Tell me, how many pumpkins do you actually need this year?'" Kara says. "And I always remind her that I can never have enough pumpkins." Kara and her husband, Tanner, had a goal to revamp their original living spaces, transforming their home and yard into a bucolic retreat. Fall and Halloween decor—ideal for both friendly gatherings and home-alone time—convert all the cozy spaces into seasonal hot spots.

Kara, Tanner, and Great Danes, Zeus and Miles, moved into their Seattle home in 2018. Kara (Instagram @littlehouseonchestnut) describes the 1,700-square-foot structure as "somewhere between a farmhouse and a cottage." It provided charm on a double lot that seemed to beg for new outdoor entertaining spaces.

The makeover began with a blank slate. Aside from the house itself, the land offered little more than a huge cedar tree, a small shed, and plenty of room for imagination.

The imagination materialized into a firepit and a raised flowerbed, as well as fencing, landscaping, and natural stone patios to define seating and dining areas. Leveled stone surrounds the venerable five-trunk cedar tree and provides a solid base for the handmade serving table. Decked out in seasonal attire, the outdoor dining table is always ready for food, drink, and conversation. Even the old shed enjoyed a facelift—making it another focal point for gathering.

For Halloween, bats, bones, crows, and witch hats are easy additions. Kara makes at least three trips to the pumpkin patch to stock up. "There's not a variety I don't love. I should probably start growing my own." Passersby even mistake the front yard of her cottage for a pumpkin patch. "There's nobody on our block wondering if we'll be giving out candy on Halloween," she says.

RULER AND PROTECTOR
Aptly named Zeus, Kara's late Great Dane, *top,* was a permanent fixture in the outdoor oasis during fall decorating and entertaining time.

IT'S A SETUP
Sweets are always a draw to the cider bar. Miniature pumpkin pies with candy corn toppers, *above left*, tempt guests. Kara reuses many decor pieces every year. A graphic skull tablecloth and festive paper straws are paired with everyday dishes, glasses, and napkins.

SIPPING CIDER
Guests can help themselves at the convenient cider bar, *above right*. Locally purchased fresh apple cider is served up in copper mugs, and a few well-chosen pumpkins and colorful mums set a welcoming scene.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Witch hats, of course! This time of year, the distinctive black hats, *above*, along with votives and pumpkins, create a table runner, and miniature pumpkins dress the place settings. The tables with benches and chairs make great gathering spots. Kara and Tanner eat meals outside anytime weather allows.

NATURE LIVES HERE

The fall bounty creates a happy space for family and friends, *right*. Taking advantage of surrounding farms, the couple load up on pumpkins, mums, cornstalks, and hay bales. Strings of Edison bulbs brighten the outdoor spaces year-round, but the orange lights come out of storage in October.

"IT'S ALMOST LIKE STAGE DECORATING. I AM ALL ABOUT SETTING UP A SCENE."

— HOMEOWNER KARA WILLIAMS

WICKEDLY *Wonderful* TREATS

WRITER FRANCES LARGEMAN-ROTH, RDN **PHOTOGRAPHER** GREG DUPREE
FOOD STYLIST CHELSEA ZIMMER **PROP STYLIST** CHRISTINE KEELY

We've got eerie eats perfect for feeding a crowd. Serve them at a Halloween bash or dish up fun after school, on a weekend, or anytime the mood strikes.

A BOO-TIFUL GRAZING TABLE

Take your Halloween shindig to the next level with a silly, spooky spread—a winning formula for all ages and taste buds.

START WITH THE SURFACE. Cover your table with a festive cloth. Next, set out any large objects and fill in with platters, cake stands, and cupcake towers for height.

THINK COLOR, SHAPE, AND TEXTURE. Choose foods that are as fun to look at as they are to eat. A few ideas: ripples of pink prosciutto wrapped around skinny breadsticks, deviled eggs, and skewers of veggies and fruits.

HAVE ENOUGH (BUT NOT TOO MUCH) FOOD. It takes a little bit of math: For a grazing table with small bites, plan on 10 pieces of food per adult, 8 pieces per older kid, and 5 per younger kid. Have six adults, two teens, and five littles coming over? You'll want at least 101 pieces of food, divided among as many items as you'd like to serve.

PUT AWAY PLASTIC CONTAINERS. There's no shame in serving store-bought food, but transfer it out of the plastic and into bowls or onto platters.

CREATE ATMOSPHERE. Fill the empty spots on your table with pumpkins in different sizes, creepy-crawly toys, and candy.

MAKE THE TABLE KID-FRIENDLY. Cut savory foods into bite-size pieces and offer nonsugary items like veggie crudités and dips, whole grain crackers, fruit, and cheese. Hangry kids aren't happy kids!

SKELETON SHEET-PAN NACHOS

Preheat broiler. Arrange 8 cups tortilla chips on a rimmed baking sheet. Top with 1 orange bell pepper, chopped, and ½ cup corn kernels (defrosted, if frozen). Sprinkle 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese evenly over chips. Place nachos in the oven 2 to 3 minutes or until cheese is melted and outer edges of chips are golden. Decorate the nachos using sour cream; warmed refried beans; sliced olives, baby bell peppers, and jalapeño peppers; and chopped avocado, scallions, and radishes to create a Day of the Dead skull or other image. *Makes 8 servings.*

GET OUT THE CANNED WHIPPED CREAM FOR EASY SQUIRTING THAT WON'T DISTURB YOUR PERFECTLY PLACED SPRINKLES.

MINI SPOOKY CEREAL SMOOTHIES

Combine 2 cups chocolate cereal (such as Cocoa Krispies) and 2 cups reduced-fat milk in a mixing bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and let soak in the refrigerator at least 2 hours or until the milk absorbs the flavor of the cereal. When it's done, use a pastry brush to lightly spread 1 to 2 Tbsp. honey along the rims of eight small glasses. Pour ½ cup Halloween-theme sprinkles into a shallow bowl. Dip the honey-coated glasses into the sprinkles until rims are completely covered. Place glasses upside down on waxed paper until smoothies are ready. Place cereal mixture, 1 frozen banana, and 6 oz. reduced-fat vanilla yogurt in a blender. Blend until smooth. Slowly pour ½ cup of smoothie into each glass. Add about 1 Tbsp. whipped cream to each glass. *Makes 8 servings.*

MONSTER FRUIT SKEWERS

Cut the ends off 8 medium-size ripe kiwis and use a vegetable peeler to remove the skin. Slice 1 large cantaloupe in half. Scoop out and discard seeds. Use a medium ice cream scoop to create melon balls. Have 8 jumbo marshmallows on hand. Using eight 8- to 10-inch skewers, thread a kiwi onto each skewer, followed by a marshmallow and a melon ball. Blot the kiwis and melon balls with paper towels. Add different-size candy eyes (such as Wilton brand), adhering with a little nut butter or honey on the backs of the eyes. Trim tops of green grapes for noses. With an edible ink pen, draw spooky faces on the marshmallows. *Makes 8 servings.*

THESE CREEPY-CRAWLIES ARE IDEAL FOR A CELEBRATION AT SCHOOL OR DAY CARE SINCE THEY'RE FREE OF NUTS AND SESAME SEEDS.

DARK CHOCOLATE SPIDER DONUTS

Place 8 store-bought chocolate mini donuts on a large baking sheet covered with parchment paper. Place ½ cup Halloween-theme sprinkles in a shallow bowl or dish. In a small bowl mix ½ cup powdered sugar with 1½ Tbsp. cocoa powder until thoroughly combined. Add 1 Tbsp. whole milk, a little at a time, and whisk into the dry mixture. Slowly whisk in 1½ tsp. water until the glaze is thick and shiny. Dip the top of each donut into the glaze, then dip into the sprinkles. Add candy eyes while glaze is still slightly wet. Break 32 pretzel sticks in half. Add legs by poking four pretzel halves into each side of donuts. *Makes 8 servings.*

Enchanted

CRAWL SPACE
Glamour creeps along a floral table scheme with surprise and a little sparkle, *left*. Organic polish takes over flowers arranged in an unexpected light-color pumpkin and in the earthy place setting. The real shock comes from spiders spray-painted gold and scattered to blend in with the formal nature of the centerpiece.

EVENINGS

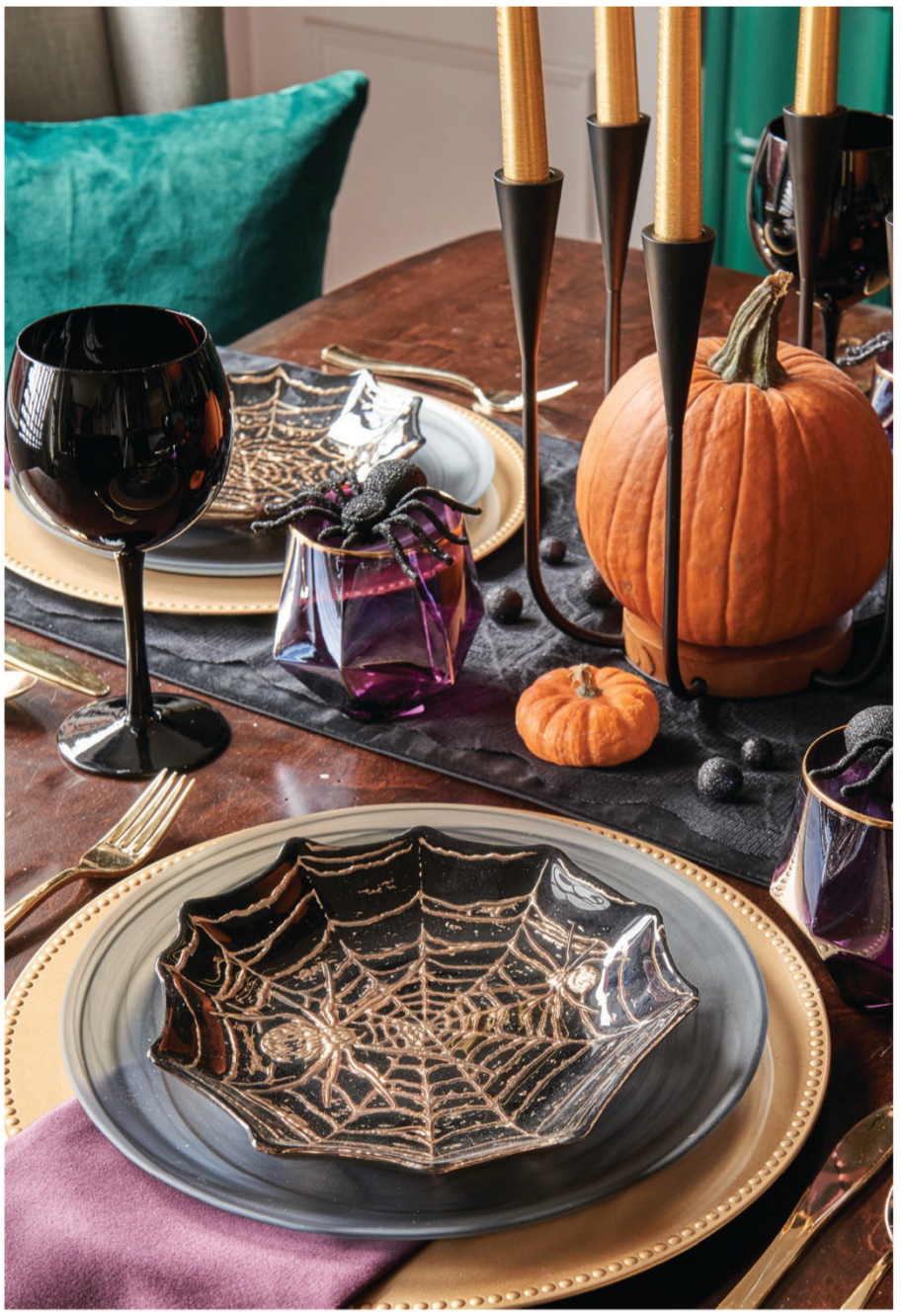
Both flair and scare top this year's sophisticated Halloween dining table. Try one of these magical settings.

PAPER PUMPKINS GALORE
A grouping of honeycomb-paper pumpkins fills the center of the table, *this photo,* with big impact. Their scale and varied shades of brown and muted orange contrast with the simplicity of hammered-glaze black plates. Green, gray, and tan paper leaves add accent color.

MONOTONE MAGIC

A graceful spiderweb tablecloth with a black lace layer sets an elegant foundation for an all-black arrangement of matte black plates and gold-accented flatware and glasses. Branches stretch down the table center and through an assortment of candlesticks. Flickering candlelight completes the chic scene.

MOODY LIGHTING IS ESSENTIAL AT HALLOWEEN. TURN DOWN THE LIGHTS FOR A SHADOWY CANDLELIGHT DINNER.



SPIDER SENSE

If you're lucky enough to score seasonal tableware, *above,* layer with standard dishware like these everyday plates and chargers to showcase your find. Purple linens and glassware create a classic Halloween palette. The gold web-embellished plates carry out the theme with sparkly spiders; black ones lurk on chunky glasses for a fun touch to an elegant look.

LACE THRILLS

Simple glass votives wrapped with lacy ribbon trim evoke a spiderweb, *above right.* An easy DIY project, glue one end of the trim at the bottom of a glass, wrap around, and adhere it with another dab of glue at the top. Mix and match ribbon trims to coordinate with your theme.

DARING DINNER

For festive place settings, *right,* pack a punch on a smaller budget. Stack seasonal melamine or paper plates on top of two woven place mats. The more graphic, the more fun! Add a mini witch hat at each place setting for extra magic. Spooky-but-cute vessels hold dried colorful grasses and plants to add height and form a boho centerpiece.

LINENS DON'T HAVE TO BE HOLIDAY SPECIFIC. USE SEASONAL COLORS AND ADD DECORATIONS FROM A CRAFTS STORE TO TELL THE HALLOWEEN STORY.

PEACHES AND CREAM

Taking its cue from a fall-theme napkin in quiet hues, this table, *above,* veers toward refinement in its display of raw raffia, peach plates, salmon-color place mats, and brass vases. An array of mini pumpkins parades down the center on ivory netting. Black accents in the form of crows and witch hats punctuate the soothing palette for a bit of unsettling appeal.

HEAD ON A PLATTER

A woven tray, *left,* stays on the dining table year-round and can hold delights for every season. For a creepy Halloween vibe, set a bleached skull amid moss, faux greenery, and white moths. The table, decked out with a cheesecloth covering and coordinated simple settings, welcomes those who dare to sit.

EYE CANDY

For this eerie tabletop walk through the woods, *opposite,* the green palette—seen in the geometric runner, jute place mat, and bright plate—leans on the woodsy additions of bamboo-handle flatware, faux-bois napkins, and wood-grain chargers. Sparkling paper bats, spiders, and skulls pair with candy and foil-wrapped chocolate eyes in small "cauldrons."

WICKED RULES

Our skeleton list of tricks will make a table as sweet as the candy that's collected.

PICK A COLOR
Monotone isn't the easy route. It's dynamic and daring as you mix shades and tones within one color.

CHANGE NATURE
Manipulate the forms of what lives and lurks outdoors to fit your palette. A can of spray paint and a little imagination can turn pumpkins black and branches gold.

SUGAR-BOMB THE TABLE Remember, perhaps the biggest draw at Halloween is the candy. Sprinkle your favorites on the table or corral them in bowls. Use colorful candies for kids and decadent chocolates for adults.

Final Thought

"MAGIC IS REALLY VERY SIMPLE. ALL YOU'VE GOT TO DO IS WANT SOMETHING AND THEN LET YOURSELF HAVE IT."

— AGGIE CROMWELL, *HALLOWEENTOWN*

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SWIRLING LEAVES

Spinning Maple Leaf blocks tumble across a throw in fall-inspired hues. Precut Friendly: Fat Quarters. Designer: Melissa Corry. Finished Quilt: 90-1/2" Square.

MONSTER MASH

PUMPKIN PICKING

FRONT RUNNER: FALL

SOFT & SPOOKY

FEELIN' FOXY

HALLOWEEN HOOPLA

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